

An Interview with  
**Neil Richards**

at his office in  
Potosi, Missouri

**09 July 1998**

interviewed by Ray Brassieur  
transcript prepared and edited  
by N. Renae Farris



**Oral History Program**  
The State Historical Society of Missouri

Collection C3965    Missouri Newspapers    a.c. 20-21



## **NOTICE**

- 1) This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17, U.S. Code). It may not be cited without acknowledgment to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, a Joint Collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts, Columbia, Missouri. Citations should include: Missouri Newspapers Oral History Project, Collection Number C3965, [name of interviewee], [date of interview], Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, Missouri.
  
- 2) Reproductions of this transcript are available for reference use only and cannot be reproduced or published in any form (including digital formats) without written permission from the Western Historical Manuscript Collection.
  
- 3) Use of information or quotations from any Missouri Newspapers Oral History Collection transcript indicates agreement to indemnify and hold harmless the University of Missouri, the State Historical Society of Missouri, their officers, employees, and agents, and the interviewee from and against all claims and actions arising out of the use of this material.

*For further information, contact:*

Western Historical Manuscript Collection  
23 Ellis Library  
University of Missouri  
Columbia, MO 65201-5149



**[Tape meter, 000. Begin Side One, Tape One of Two. Begin interview.]**

RB: The following interview with Neil Richards, publisher of the Potosi Independent-Journal, takes place in Mr. Richards' office on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1998. To begin with, Mr. Richards, is it Neil?

NR: *[Affirmatively]* Mm-hmm.

RB: We are going to ask just a couple of questions about your life to get some biographical information just to begin with, and then we'll talk more about the paper as we go along.

NR: Okay.

RB: Where are you from, Mr. Richards?

NR: Right here. Born right here in Potosi.

RB: And when were you born?

NR: January the 8<sup>th</sup>, 1939. Born in a house up on Pine Street -- actually Richardson Road, where it turns into Pine.

RB: Your dad and mom, where were they from?

NR: Right here, both of them. Natives.

RB: What was your dad's name?

NR: Hugh.

RB: Hugh Richards?

NR: Yes.

RB: And your mom was?

NR: Is Ruby. She's still alive, eighty-nine years old, becoming ninety in... No, she'll be eighty-nine the 6<sup>th</sup> of December.

RB: What was her maiden name?

NR: Weber.

RB: Now, that's a German name.

NR: Yes. Her grandfather came over here from Germany when he was a young man.

RB: So her grandfather -- that would have been about the middle of the last century?

NR: '70s. [1870s]

RB: In the '70s?

NR: Yeah, about somewhere around that. 1860s or 1870s, early.

RB: Is she kin to the Webers from the Ste. Genevieve area?

NR: Not that I know of. We have some family that are related in Bonne Terre, but mostly around here.

RB: How about the Richards family?

NR: They're almost *all* from here.

RB: So your dad's parents -- were they from here too?

NR: Yes.

RB: How far back do you know that the Richards family goes?

NR: Well, my sisters would have a lot of that information. (Chuckling) But I don't have. I've got some sisters that are really into genealogy lately and they've traced some stuff back pretty far, but *personally* all I know of is my... I didn't get to *know* my *grandfather* because he died four years before I was born. [*Slight pause*] Three years before I was born. 1936 is when he died.

RB: Well, that was one thing I was going to ask you. Coming from Louisiana like I do, I was wondering if your name was “Richard”? [*pronounced in the French manner, Rēshārd*]

(Chuckles)

NR: (Chuckles) No.

RB: There’s a lot of them down there! (laughs)

NR: Yeah! Yeah. No, I think it was Bohemian.

RB: Bohemian?

NR: Yeah, I believe.

RB: And it always had that spelling, you think?

NR: [*Affirmatively*] Mm-hmm. That’s the indication that I have. Now, we have some relatives who put a “T” on the end instead of an “S.”

RB: I’ve known some Richardts, Richard with the “T.” And they’re related to you?

NR: Well, they claim they are, you know.

RB: (laughs)

NR: You know how that is. (chuckles)

RB: Right. Okay, what kind of a business was your dad in?

NR: He was here [at the newspaper], right here, from the time he was sixteen years old. He was here forty-one years. He died in 1956.

RB: In other words, he was with the newspaper.

NR: Yes, because he went to work here when he was sixteen years old. Never finished high school. And he and my uncle bought the newspaper in 1945.

RB: Now what was your uncle’s name?

NR: Lowel McFarland.

RB: Lowel McFarland? And that was on which side?

NR: His wife and my mother are sisters. Webers. There was five Weber girls, one of them died in infancy.

RB: So it was on your mom's side. And he decided to buy the paper, and he bought in what year, you say? 194\_?

NR: He and my dad bought it in 1945.

RB: Oh, so they went into partnership then?

NR: Yeah, partnership. My dad was working here. My uncle was in Illinois. And his wife was teaching and he was working for (I believe) Emerson Electric. They came back here and took over the paper. The history of the paper is a little... The *Bells* were very much interested in Democrat politics in the state, and Wilson Bell was the last owner before my dad and my uncle. And he was Secretary of State, I believe. Treasurer? Yeah, I believe it was Secretary of State. He was a state official, I know that for sure.<sup>1</sup>

**[Tape meter, 050]**

And he had been away from here but, you know, still owned the paper and they were taking care of it. He came home and told them he had it sold. And you know, they panicked! (chuckles) Going to be out of a job or didn't know what. They told them the price and told them they could "have two weeks to come with the money and buy it yourself, if you want to." So he got my uncle, and they got some support from the local businesspeople and put together a corporation and bought it in 1945.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Richards is correct on both offices. Wilson Bell served as State Treasurer from 1941 to 1945, and then as Missouri Secretary of State from 1945 until his untimely death in 1947.



RB: Now that Bell that you talk about, is that B-E-L-L?

NR: Yes.

RB: And he had owned it prior to...?

NR: Well, actually his dad and his grandfather. Wilson really didn't have it very long. He and his brother John had it for just a little while. But H.C. Bell -- Henry -- H.C. Bell, he had been here for years.

RB: He must have had it for most of the early part of the century then.

NR: Even before the turn of the century, *I think*. I haven't researched that, but I'm pretty sure.<sup>2</sup> See, the paper started in 1872 [as the] Weekly Independent, and then it merged with the Potosi Journal in '29, I believe it was, to become the Independent Journal.

RB: This Henry Bell, then, may have been involved in that merger.

NR: Well, I'm sure he was.

RB: He was around at that time.

NR: Considerably before that.

RB: How about the location of the paper? Is it the same?

NR: How far has it been moved?

RB: Uh-huh.

NR: Okay, it was originally two buildings west of where it is now, in a little wooden building that stood on that property. Then it moved into rental space in the building which is next door. Then in about '50 or '51, they bought that building. And then in [*thoughtful pause*] '60 -- somewhere around '60 -- we sold that building over there and moved into

---

<sup>2</sup> He is correct on this point. Henry Castleman Bell began working at about the age of eleven as an apprentice for the Weekly Independent in 1877, becoming its managing editor in 1886, and then its owner in 1888.

here. Actually, we had already bought this building, and broke through and were using part of it, and then we added onto the back and moved everything over here, and sold that building for a restaurant. And that was probably '62, '63, somewhere in that neighborhood.

RB: So that's where the restaurant is today?

NR: Where the restaurant is over there, that used to be... The front part of it was the newspaper on the far side and a barbershop on this side. And we came around behind and on around behind into this building, too.

RB: Well, this building was a pretty old building.

NR: They were all built at the same time, 1936. Almost all of this was built in '36. Of course, you know how it used to be -- towns got wiped out by fires. Well, that's what happened. Most of this got wiped out by fires and new buildings were built in... '36, I believe, is when they were completed.

RB: So they must have had a horrible fire here in the mid-'30s sometime. Just accidental...

NR: Oh, yeah. Oh, I'm sure. Wintertime stuff or something. Overheated... You know, everybody had stoves and what have you. I never did hear exactly what happened, but that is what happened is that there some heavy fire damage. See, like four buildings on west of where we are on this side of the street *used* to be a great big three-story hotel. Now, I don't remember it being there, but that's what I'm *told* was there at the time.  
(chuckles)

RB: A major building, then?

NR: Yes, it was a *big* building. Big building. Had twenty some odd rooms, I think, in it.

RB: Now, your dad took over the paper or bought the paper in partnership with your uncle there in 1945. But he had come to work here earlier.

NR: Oh, yeah.

RB: About what time did he start?

NR: Well, he was sixteen years old, so that would have been... He died in '56, so it would have been 1915.

RB: And do you know what role he played at that time? I mean, when he first started?

NR: You know, everybody did everything in those days. Back in those days, well, you set type -- hand set type. (chuckles)

**[Tape meter, 100]**

They didn't have any type of, really, machinery until probably early '40s maybe.

Wartime, maybe right after wartime, before they got linotypes.

RB: Okay, so he came as a... And he was probably helping to set type.

NR: He did hand set type, yes. And they had a four-page press. You know, they made the stuff up, printed it themselves. Did the whole thing. Sheet-fed.

RB: That must have been an old machine then. Gosh!

NR: Well, you know, I can remember it! (laughs)

RB: You can remember it?

NR: Oh, yeah! It was a great big Miehle. I remember when we moved it out.

RB: Where'd it go to?

NR: I can't remember what was done with it. It probably was junked. A wrecker took it out of here, out of the front of that building over there. Ah, let's see. I'm sure that's what was done with it. It was junked.

RB: Just a big piece of cast (chuckling) \_\_\_\_\_ at that time.

NR: Really. Yeah.

RB: And so your dad was doing that. Had the machinery changed before he bought the paper?

NR: Yes, about that time they were... They'd had probably, maybe for five... Probably just right before the war, maybe. See, about the time I was born they got their first hot metal machines. They were actually intertypes, not linotypes.

RB: What kind?

NR: Intertype. It's just a competitive machine. It's made a *little* bit different, but there's not much difference in it.

RB: But it involved the melting of this lead?

NR: Right.

RB: And the pouring of castings, that linotype.

NR: Yeah.

RB: Now, he would have had to make the adjustment, I guess. Before he bought the building he made the adjustment as a worker here.

NR: Yeah.

RB: Do you know if he was what they'd call a linotype operator?

NR: Well, yeah, he set type. (chuckles) You know, he was not trained. He trained himself. He didn't go away to... You know, they used to have a school at Columbia.

RB: Right, that was the early center for that kind of thing. But he didn't go to school, your dad didn't?

NR: No.

RB: No graduation from any level. But when you came along then -- you were born in 1939... So you have some of your youth at a time when your dad was just working here? Before he owned [the newspaper.]

NR: Not in my memory, though. I *really* don't remember it because of the wartime. During the wartime you didn't go much of anyplace or talk much... You know, every night the radio was turned on to see what was going on in the war and that was about it!

(chuckles)

RB: You do remember that?

NR: Oh, yeah!

RB: You have memories of that.

NR: I remember the stamps and rationing and stuff, yes.

RB: I was going to ask you another question. It's kind of off on a tangent there, but do you remember the strikes that they had here in town?

NR: No. I've been told about them, but I don't remember them. They didn't actually occur *in* Potosi. Out at the mines is where they were. You're talking about the tiff miners' strikes? Yeah.

RB: And they happened over in where?

NR: I would say probably the Cadet area, Old Mines. There may have been a time or two that there was something that occurred here in town, but mostly it was... See, they had their company stores and *everything*. National Lead Company. You know, they had their houses just where the miners lived and everything.

RB: I wonder if the paper must have covered that?

NR: I \_\_\_\_\_ to look at it, but I know it's bound to be there. I've never thought about it. It was not in my time so I've never really thought about it.

RB: That must have had some coverage.

NR: I'm sure we would have had some.

RB: So your early memories then... Do you remember coming into the place?

NR: Oh, yes! Yes, I worked -- you know, like folding, inserting papers, taking them to the post office, that type of thing -- by, I'm sure, [the time I was] eight or nine years old.

**[Tape meter, 150]**

I know for a fact that the first time I ever got paid for anything I was twelve. I remember that. (laughs)

RB: You actually got paid for...

NR: Got paid for something because it was a job that they made some money on, for a change. (chuckling) You know, it was a commercial printing job that they did for a business locally, and I got a little money out of it. First time.

RB: So they would do other jobs beside the newspaper?

NR: Oh, yes! What they called commercial printing, job printing.

RB: Now, how about your mom? Was she involved in the business?

NR: Not until my dad passed away. When he passed away then she came to work here as a bookkeeper.

RB: But she didn't keep books before that or any other...?

NR: No, she stayed home to take care of [the] kids.

RB: How many...?

NR: I have three sisters. One that is older and two who are younger.

RB: Did they get involved at all in the...?

NR: None at all.

RB: Not in the business. But you were sort of led into it.

NR: Well, I've been here my entire life, I guess. You know, it's the way I feel. I had really -- with my dad -- basically [I] was stuck on going... I was going to [go to] school to be an architect. That's what we had in mind, but when he died between [my] junior and senior year and things turned out like they did, I couldn't see myself going anyplace else but here. I mean, the business was here and so I felt like I needed to be here.

RB: Your dad died when?

NR: '56.

RB: '56, and you were still in high school.

NR: I was a junior in high school.

RB: And now your uncle then [who] had the business, had the load, I guess.

NR: (chuckles) Why, yeah, I guess you could call it that! He didn't even work here. He came by and put in a little bit of time, but he was a music teacher at school and taught at

Viburnum, forty-something miles away. He was here a little bit on the weekends and maybe a little bit each evening, but basically the business took care of itself.

RB: Yeah! So he had to have some pretty good hands.

NR: Well, we've had some people that's been here a pretty long time. We *did* have, let's say it that a-way. We don't anymore. We have a man who is still here *part-time* who went to work here in May of 1950. He's still working part-time.

RB: That's close to fifty years now. How a fellow is he now?

NR: He's just retired. 16<sup>th</sup> of July he'll be sixty-three, I believe.

**[Small amount of incidental conversation omitted.]**

RB: So he must have started pretty young then?

NR: He didn't finish school. He started [in the] eighth grade. He came here in eighth grade, then he went to two years of high school and in his junior year quit and came to work full-time. He got himself in a situation where he had an automobile that he needed to pay for and couldn't do that if he went back to school. You know how it was.

RB: Once you get debt...

NR: He wasn't doing that well in school anyway, so he quit. (laughs)

RB: And his name is Whitten?

NR: His is Fabian DeClue.

RB: Oh, Fabian DeClue. So he's a DeClue from here. He's one on the French side, there.

NR: Yeah.

RB: And been here for fifty years.

NR: Almost.



RB: Now, what did he do here? Did end up op[erating the press]? Like you say, everybody does everything?

NR: Well, he was a printer and a typesetter. Advertising.

**[Tape meter, 200]**

Made up advertising for probably [the] last forty years, is what he's done is advertising composition and commercial printing composition, too. You know, when you're not working on the paper. We used to have every one of the grocery stores -- and [there were] more grocery stores than there are now -- had a page ad each week, and those were made up [with] hot metal and wood type and what have you. It was a job! And that's what he did.

RB: Gosh, almighty!

NR: And he had a brother that came here and worked for us for about ten years doing the same thing. And then he had a *half*-brother that worked for us for about four or five years setting text for the paper, and [he] learned a little bit on some advertising and what have you. Newspapers are family stuff. (laughs)

RB: It's a family thing, isn't it?

NR: Always is. Almost always is.

RB: It's just a consistent theme of people I've talked to is the numbers of family [members working together in a newspaper operation.]

NR: You'll notice that my son is here. (laughs)

RB: Now what's your son's name?

NR: Kris. Spelled with a “K,” K-R-I-S. Kristopher Hugh [Richards.] Named after his grandpa.

RB: But then the story that you just told there, that the... You know, the most common story that I’ve run across is that the publisher or owner or whatever would run in the family. The family involvement was [common.] Now what you’re saying then is that other employees also...

NR: Everyplace around was the same. *Used* to be. When it was skilled trade. It *isn’t* now. You know what I’m saying? Back whenever you had to know a little bit of something about what you were doing and you ran presses and you ran folders and you ran machinery, it was no different at any level of the job. People talked about it at home and when a job came available, they brought their brothers in, they brought their sisters in. You know, I mean that’s just the way it was! It’s that way in *every* newspaper that I knew of, families.

RB: Right. Not only at the top level, \_\_\_\_\_. Any level in the paper.

NR: Top level or any level. You know, that’s the way you got your employees when you needed somebody. [You’d ask your employees] whether they had somebody in the family [who wanted a job,] if it was a cousin or what have you. But that’s pretty well the way you got [employees.]

RB: Right. Mr. DeClue there, he was working already when your dad died.

NR: Yes. Yes, he and his older brother was working here, too, then at that time.

RB: Now in high school, were you pretty active here at the paper?

NR: I did some, but not a whole lot. You know, I came here every evening after school if we didn't have ball practice or something. Yeah, I came every evening. And I had to work a lot of Saturdays, [there was] stuff on Saturdays that could be done. But you didn't have much to do with the paper. You know, that was usually clean-up work and what have you.

RB: Was there a term for that status employee?

NR: Well, not really. You know, people call them "printer's devils," but I guess that's as good as anything. But I don't think I was termed to be a printer's devil by anybody other than somebody else. I never hear it in the trade! (laughs) That's something that you hear from other people. But you know, that's fine. (chuckling) There's nothing wrong with that at all. Anybody that's learning the trade, I guess, is a [printer's devil.] It fits. (chuckles)

**[Tape meter, 250]**

RB: A "go-fer," is what they call them. (chuckles)

NR: Yeah, you do just about everything. You know, did all kinds of painting, you did whatever needed to be done. A lot of cleanup work, storage.

RB: Let's see, you don't probably recall then the transition that your dad experienced when they came from hand set to \_\_\_\_\_.

NR: It probably happened right before I was born, [that] would be my guess. I'd say not too much after the *[thoughtful pause]* Depression time. Probably not a whole lot after the Depression time. Their first mechanized equipment probably came '35, '36, somewhere in that neighborhood, and then they had three machines by the time I was here.

RB: And whoever that had owned the paper -- like you say, this Bell family -- they had to make that transition, and it cost a lot of money, I'm sure.

NR: At that time it was a *lot* of money, because newspapers didn't make anything. *Still* don't make a lot, you know, (chuckles) that's just...

RB: Right. But by the time your dad came into the ownership of it, he bought the paper with that machinery that was going.

NR: Right.

RB: And what did they have? That was for setting up the page and everything, the linotype. Did he have any other kind of press?

NR: They had a four-page press. Miehle is what it was called. A Miehle. I believe [it] was a [Model] Number Five, Miehle. Printed four pages at a time that were broadsheet, eight columns by twenty-one inches.

RB: Now what was the next change in that? I know there's been so many changes there since then.

NR: Well, when we got rid of that over there and moved to this building, we put in what was called a Duplex. It was a roll-fed press rather than sheet-fed, folder involved in the press. It had four pages on two different decks. It printed on one side and then printed on the other side of the paper as it came around, and cut it off, folded it, and it came out as a complete copy. Probably started that in [*thoughtful pause*] '59 or '60.

RB: Uh-huh. Now, let me go back. You say your dad died in '56. You decided to [work at the newspaper.] Did you go right into the work at the paper?

NR: We had modernized. Oh, I had [come to work then,] yes. I came right straight to work at the paper, yes. Soon as I graduated in 1957.

RB: But you did graduate?

NR: Yes.

RB: So you were able to graduate and you didn't have to stop your high school [education.]

NR: No, I went ahead and graduated and much to the disgust of my mother, didn't go to college. (laughs)

**[Tape meter, 300]**

And came right straight to work here. All of my involvement at time was typesetting on a linotype and taking care of production. Well, I was involved in press repair and all that type of thing.

RB: And that was a pretty active job.

NR: Just about anything that needed to happen, you know, that's what I was involved in then.

We had an editor at that time, and [he] had been here several years.

RB: Who was that?

NR: George Showalter.

RB: George was the editor?

NR: You remember George, don't you?

RB: I was very good friends with George.

NR: Yes.

RB: I miss him.

NR: George came here in '58 and was drafted. [He] went to the service and came back in '62, probably, '61. '61, I think, and [he] worked for us from '61 to '71, and in 1971 went to work for the school system.

RB: So he wasn't involved in the school system prior to that, he was the editor.

NR: No, he was here. Thirteen years.

RB: Would you say just on that line there, talking about editorship for a moment and that kind of content of the paper there, did he mark a change in the paper at all \_\_\_\_\_?

NR: Oh, of course! He was educated in journalism and knew a whole lot more. That's when we became so centered on pictures. Started using a lot of pictures at that time. Previous to that it didn't happen as much, but it was also not as convenient to use pictures. We invested in some equipment that made it easier to use pictures, and used a lot more of them.

RB: Mm-hmm, in the '60s.

NR: George loved to take them! (chuckles)

RB: Yeah. Had the paper used some pictures, though, prior to that?

NR: Oh, yes. Yes, we used some pictures. My dad took pictures with the old four by five camera back in the late '40s and '50s. He took quite a few photographs back in those days.

RB: Had the Bells been involved in that photography at all?

NR: They mostly used canned stuff in their paper.

RB: Things that came to them or were sent to them.

NR: Yeah. Before [*thoughtful pause*] wartime... You know, they sent a lot of soldiers' pictures out and stuff during wartime. They used a lot of that. Previous to '41, there wasn't many photographs in *any* papers -- not in the country, anyway. You know, you might find them in St. Louis, but in the country you didn't see many photographs.

**[Tape meter, 350]**

There just wasn't any way to do it. In our earliest days that *I* remember with the photographs, we used to send them... My dad used to make them on a unit called a Tasope. [*Pronounced Tasōpā.*] Where they exposed them onto a zinc plate and then etched the image in that zinc plate. And that's what they printed off of. It wasn't a real good system, but it was an improvement, (chuckles) a little bit, over what they had done before. Then when George came here, why, they started... You'd get your pictures together by Thursday for the next week's paper, put them in the mail to *Texas*, and they made the plates down there for you and got them back to you for use in the next week's paper.

RB: Gosh! And those plates were made of what?

NR: At that time they were made of zinc, still. Then the next progression was to plastic.

RB: And the plastic then and the zinc before that, they were set up in a frame?

NR: Mm-hmm.

RB: With the rest of the type?

NR: You floated them on wood. They were mounted on wood.

RB: That made the plate for the entire sheet, there.

NR: That made for just the picture portion of it. The rest of it was metal. A page weighed eighty, ninety pounds.

RB: (laughs) A page of the paper!

NR: A page of the paper weighed eighty or ninety pounds, yes. Had to be locked up. You know, you had “quoins” (is what they were called), and you had a key that turned it, and you tightened it up and then you tried lifting it. And if you had anything that didn’t lift, well, then you had to open it back up and put a little more spacing in so that you got it all right. Sometimes you had what they called “leads,” which were two-point...<sup>3</sup>

**[Tape meter, 391. End Side One, Tape One of Two.]**

**[Tape meter, 001. Begin Side Two, Tape One of Two.]**

RB: Okay, now, you were saying something about lead. You were talking about the pieces.

NR: Okay, it’s a *thin* piece of spacing material. It’s called a “lead.” It was two points. Then the next was a “slug,” which was six points. You’d take three of the others to make equal to it. And then you had other spacing -- which could have been “reglets” or “furniture” or whatever -- which would be like twelve points, which would be double what the [slug] was; eighteen points which was a heavier thing. If you had a *real* big area that you needed to space, you had cast blocks that you could put in that would hold it.

RB: Would those cast blocks just be plain or did they have a design?

NR: Well, it depended on what you wanted to do with it. If it was just *space*, you didn’t have anything. If you were using them for something, well then, you could float a picture on them or whatever you decided to do. See, originally everything was cast in solid metal,

---

<sup>3</sup> Meaning that the lead would create a two point, or 1/36<sup>th</sup> of an inch, spacing between lines of text.



type-high. Which is almost an inch. I forget what the exact measurement is. It was type-high, anyway. But then they started what they called “shell casting.” They were cast just a quarter of an inch thick against a mat. That gave you your image. Then you floated that on your... You know, you put it on wood -- we mounted it on plywood, we mounted it on metal, we mounted it on cast iron. We had a bunch of cast iron blocks that were four inches square. You could put them in there. And they were all pre-set to the right... You know, they had all been *made* so that they were [the] right height. That lightened your page up a little bit. (chuckles)

RB: Yeah. Then when you mention the word “furniture,” what would that apply to?

NR: It is actual maple wood, and it’s something that is an exact measure. Everything for newspaper is in Picas. And it’d be two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve picas wide and it’d be ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty picas long. It was made for spacing. That’s what they put between the wood type, that’s what you filled with so that you could lock the frame up. And it would lift to get on a press.

RB: Was there a company that you bought that stuff from?

NR: Yes. You could probably still buy it, I imagine. It’s not something that somebody’s running out to get nowadays, but yeah, American Typefounders had a catalog that you could buy just about anything from. In Lenexa, Kansas was the last place that I remember ordering from them. ATF.

RB: Now you’ve gone to this Duplex [press] and you still have this linotype operation. And that continued... It wasn’t the linotype, though. What was that?

NR: It was intertype.

RB: An intertype, though, and you all continued with that on 'til...?

NR: Too long! (chuckles) We stayed with it too long. We never felt that we could justify the investment of a press to go offset. And getting printed somewhere else wasn't really popular at that time. Everybody was trying to maintain their independence. You know, still be so that somebody else [wasn't] responsible for your printing. I mean, when you got ready to print, you wanted to go to press. But we should have changed to offset probably [by the] mid to late '60s, but we continued to print hot metal. And in the early '70s -- '71 or '72 -- it began to get to be a problem for advertisers to provide you with the necessary mats so that you could make them up an ad. It started to get to be a real problem.

RB: Why was that a problem?

NR: Because it was expensive and they weren't doing them anymore because the majority of people had gone to where they were doing just the photograph system, which is offset today. It's all photographic, see? And they weren't going to go to that extra expense just for a few country papers that didn't anything else.

**[Tape meter, 050]**

And when it got to where there wasn't many left, it was getting to a point that we were *pretty* certain we were going to have to do something, but we hadn't done it yet. In February of 1974, the press was running with our last run of the paper -- just getting started good -- and it just fell in the floor! (chuckles) The head broke off of it, the arm sheared right off. There was nothing [that] could be done. And we panicked. I mean, we didn't have the paper out. We had maybe 250 printed. And we called... I can't think of

his name. Jack at Hillsboro.<sup>4</sup> I'll think of it in a minute. Anyway, we called up there to Hillsboro and I said, "We've got an emergency. When could we get a paper printed?" And he said, "We're just getting the last of ours off the press. If you can be here within the hour, we'll put you right on and get you done." And we adjusted to a Wednesday press schedule that would work for them, and we stayed on that until *they* sold. Hillsboro was sold to a group that bought [a] Festus paper out. And we followed it there. And the famous Ingersoll [Publications] (chuckles) situation in St. Louis... Did you ever know about that?

RB: Tell me what happened.

NR: He [Ralph Ingersoll, II] bought the suburban journals and then he started buying everybody else. He had no plan. He had absolutely no plan. And apparently had no money, either, I guess. I don't know. He was off running newspapers in Europe and was just buying and buying and buying and doing all kinds of expanding and what have you. All of a sudden, it was just like blowing up a balloon. It went too far and it broke.

RB: That was mid-'70s, then?

NR: No, that was late '80s. That was the late '80s. We printed at Hillsboro for probably twelve years, and at Festus for maybe six. [*Pauses, then thinks aloud.*] No, probably four and a half at Festus. This was 1989, Spring of 1989 they told me they weren't going to be there anymore. I had to go to Donnelly's at up north of the airport, St. Louis. Got the interesting experience of driving on [Interstate] 270 at just about rush hour (chuckles) time and get all the way around that. That was the worst experience of my life to drive

---

<sup>4</sup> Probably referring to John S. Schneider, the publisher of the Jefferson County Record.

up there and wait to get a paper printed and get back home. They had no respect for you at all. You'd call them before you left and they'd say, "Oh, yeah, we're running on schedule. It'll be fine when you get here. We'll get you on a press." A *lot* of times I went up there and set. *Absolutely* all night before they ever printed a thing.

RB: They'd just be running behind.

NR: Well, just anything and everything happened, or they may just lie to you or somebody [would] else come in and they'd print them instead. There was nobody in control. That's what was wrong. I mean it was absolutely nobody in control. And I went there for four months, I guess. March, April, May, and June. And the last week of June of 1989 I went to Washington, Missouri to get my paper printed, and that's where I've been going ever since.

RB: There's an old [newspaper] family there, isn't there?

NR: Yes. [The] Millers [have] been there for a long time.<sup>5</sup>

RB: Were they able to continue printing their own [newspaper]?

NR: Yes, they print several papers.

RB: And then also print for surrounding communities.

NR: Yes. They were big enough that they invested at the right time and then have been able to maintain. If I wanted to print my own paper today and print it the way *they* print it, it would cost me [*thoughtful pause*] three million, four million dollars for what you needed.

**[Tape meter, 100]**

---

<sup>5</sup> The publishers of the Washington Missourian.

Then you wouldn't be able to hire any press men because you'd only have an hour and a half's work for them a week. (laughs)

RB: Because it's quick work.

NR: Yeah, it's just like... It's done! And then besides that, if you don't have a newsprint quota, you can't buy any newsprint. And I don't have any newsprint quota. I haven't bought any newsprint since 1973. (chuckles)

RB: News...?

NR: To print on, you know. Paper to print on.

RB: You haven't bought any paper to print on because you didn't have...?

NR: No. See, I haven't had a press.

RB: Haven't had a press, uh-huh, no use to buy that.

NR: Now, you could argue that what they print our paper on at Washington is our quota, and you could probably end up getting it, but you'd probably have to go to court. No telling what it would involve. A few years ago, just not too long ago, there was a big job printing firm in Chicago that had one of the sons decided that *he* wanted to go into the newspaper business. And he got everything together, hired thirty-five people and was ready to put a paper out, and could not buy any newsprint anywhere. He ended up *buying* another firm that was in the newspaper business in order to get their quota so that he could start printing.

RB: Gosh!

NR: (laughs)

RB: You don't think about that now, just the paper.

NR: See, the environmental constraints have been such...

**[Tape meter, 120. Man interrupts, introductions exchange. Incidental conversation omitted. Interview resumes, tape meter 154.]**

RB: So your printing went offsite, but you had to continue to produce the paper.

NR: Right. To start out with, since it happened like instantly -- (chuckles) in a matter hours we were in the offset business and we were not *prepared* for it! We had to start *getting* prepared. At first what we did is continued with the hot metal system. We would take page proofs, and take them up there and they would photograph our pages that we had ready to print in hot metal for them, and then they would print it in offset.

RB: So you'd have to haul those...

NR: We just made proof sheets off of the page. We still had the old press, and we'd run a sheet through and make a proof.

RB: Four sheet proof?

NR: Well, we had a different one. It's still down there. We bought one that we printed just job printing on. It was a little smaller, and it was in this basement and it's still there.

RB: But you saw at that point that you had to get into offset?

NR: We knew it already, but we were resisting because of wanting to stay independent. You know, I *still* do not feel *real* comfortable with not being able to produce my own paper. But you can't do it! You can't do it! And there's one thing about not owning a press: You don't have upkeep, you don't have the worry of employees, and you know *exactly* what it costs you to do. Whereas the way it was before, you *never* knew what it was

going to cost, how long it was going to take to be done, anything! You know, you started and when you were done, you were done!

RB: You solved all the problems that it took to do it.

NR: Right. Whatever it took, however long it took. Had all the paper to store and all of that to worry about. It's different, it's much different. You know every week exactly what you've done, whereas back then it was open-ended. You never knew. It's just like when the press broke. No telling what it could have cost to have fixed that had I decided to fix it. And had it not happened in the middle of a press run, I may have tried to do that. But when we made the change, the paper looked so much better. (chuckling) I mean it made all the difference in the world in the production.

RB: Now what about the actual change, though? It was a change in technology. Were you familiar with any of that? You had the \_\_\_\_\_.

NR: Oh, we had been involved in offset printing as far as commercial printing for *years*. We were probably one of the *first* that ever had an offset press in this country, although it was not a happy situation. My dad had one in the early 1950s, and it was one of those things that just never worked. It just absolutely never worked. In order to get 500 printed out of it, you may waste 1,500. It just did not work good. But that gave us a bad taste for offset.

RB: That was another reason to...

NR: Yeah. We weren't familiar enough with it and we still had, like I said, all these men here that didn't know how to type. They knew how to run the machinery and get a newspaper

out, but they knew nothing about typing at a typewriter. So you have to change. We gradually went to all photographic in the typesetting.

**[Tape meter, 200]**

Every bit of it, we got to where we handled it nothing but photographic in the typesetting -- you know, the regular reading matter in the paper. And still kept the hot metal for all the advertising. And then we gradually did away with all of the type, the old hot metal stuff, and went to a situation where it was all photographic. And as you know, I'm sure, that didn't last long. (chuckles) Now it's all computer.

RB: That's right. Now, when your old press broke, that was about I'd say halfway in George's tenure here...

NR: No. No, no. George was gone already.

RB: Oh, he was already gone.

NR: Yeah, because he left in '71.

RB: He left in '71, okay. So that was mid-'70s [when the press broke.]

NR: See, I bought my uncle out in '68.

RB: Oh, that's what I was going to ask you about. Your uncle, whether he was still involved.

NR: Yeah. He hadn't been around doing much at all as far as the paper was concerned. He was still teaching school and had another newspaper of his own, a little one at Viburnum that he ran. And didn't even come here to work. He went to Steelville and made up his little paper over there, and they got it printed at Washington (chuckles) back in those days. Quad County Star, is what it was called. It's still out there. Little bitty throw-away.



RB: Now, had that family been involved in the newspaper?

NR: No.

RB: That'd be like your mom's side?

NR: No.

RB: But he got involved because your dad had got a job here...

NR: Right.

RB: ...and then they somehow got involved in it. But he got really involved in the managing of these papers more or less.

NR: Mm-hmm.

RB: But you bought him out in '6\_?

NR: '68. So I had inherited 1/16<sup>th</sup> of the paper from my father. My mother, and my three sisters, and myself had shared in the inheritance when my dad died. So I had 1/16<sup>th</sup> of the business. And then whenever my uncle decided he was retiring -- or actually changing jobs, I suppose, kind of retired -- [he] went to Oklahoma where his son was. Why, I bought him out, and that gave me fifty-six percent of the business, which is what I still own.

RB: So you are still in partnership with your mom...

NR: With my mother and my sisters and my son. He has a small share.

RB: Uh-huh. Now your son has come in...

NR: Small amount.

RB: ...he's invested in it.

NR: He's been here since '83. And he was also raised in the business, you know. (laughs)  
Same thing \_\_\_\_\_.

RB: Did your mom have a...? Was she able to go to school at all?

NR: My mother?

RB: Uh-huh.

NR: She was a teacher. Yeah, she went to college in Cape Girardeau when it was called the Southeast Normal School, I guess at that time, wasn't it? And got a teaching degree. And was a rural one-room school teacher before she was married. But then after she got married and through all the time that she had children to raise, why, she didn't work [outside the home] until my dad died.

**[Tape meter, 250]**

RB: Yeah, because schoolteachers in those days were not married. (chuckles)

NR: Right. Basically that's right.

RB: When you were married you weren't a schoolteacher anymore.

NR: That's right, basically. Yeah, she taught at about, oh, four or five different one-room schools.

RB: Here in the area?

NR: Right here. Yes, locally.

RB: You know, she may have some very interesting stories from that period. Does she have a pretty good memory from back in those days?

NR: Oh, yeah.

RB: Because that would have been, say, in before 1920?

NR: That would have been... Let's see, she would have been... *[thoughtful pause]* Yeah, that's what it would have been, 1918, '19, '20, '21.

RB: And I just wonder if she might have some memories. For example, I know there were French people here and I wonder what a one-room school would have been like at that time. There were some people evidently that were speaking a lot of French if not *all*.

NR: Let's see, I don't know that she taught that way. She taught on [State Route] 185. I forget what the name of the school was out there. ?Higginbotham's? Then she taught in a basically -- all the people were [of] *German* descent -- south of town here about five miles, Hochstatter School.<sup>6</sup> And she taught one here. I believe maybe she did teach one year down at Old Mines or in that area.

We have lots of French relatives on *her* side. Her mother was a Tarrants. And most of their family was Portell and what have you, so there's a lot of...

RB: Did your mom speak French?

NR: No.

RB: She never did?

NR: No.

RB: But some her family did, probably.

NR: Well, probably some of her ancestors did. See, her mother died [when she] was real young, too. Her mother died... I was born in January, and she died in April [of] '39.

RB: So you didn't know your grandma on that side.

NR: Mm-mm. Didn't know her at all.

---

<sup>6</sup> Also known as Seyfarth School.

RB: The community aspect, that's another big, big story, but that's also very interesting here in Potosi. And I suspect from a schoolteacher's point of view it's interesting. And that'd be a good perspective to \_\_\_\_\_.

NR: She and her older sister both went to school together at Cape.

RB: They were sent from here to down there?

NR: Yeah.

RB: In other words, that's where they could go to college.

NR: Mm-hmm.

RB: Gosh!

NR: That's where my grandpa took them! (chuckles)

RB: That would have been quite an experience, I would suspect, anyway.

NR: Oh, I'm sure it was.

RB: You know, to have gone down there in those days from...

NR: I'm sure it was. And when they went they stayed. You didn't come back. (chuckling)  
There wasn't no coming home like the kids do nowadays every weekend and stuff like that. You know, they took them to school [and] they stayed at school until it was over!  
(chuckles)

RB: Let's see, let's get back [onto the subject of the newspaper business.] You were in the offset then and now...

**[Tape meter, 300]**

You invested in some equipment to go ahead and produce your paper. What sort of equipment? You had to have the photographic layout...

NR: Yes, we had to enlarge the darkroom, [and] get a copy camera, a big camera that would handle full-page size negatives. We first bought a line of equipment called “Compugraphic,” and that’s what we used. The photographic paper is what it did its printing on. Then we probably got our first computers in... *[thoughtful pause]* We got the first Compugraphics in ’80, maybe, I’d say. Time flies when you’re having fun. Let’s see, we probably had our first Compugraphic stuff in ’77 or ’78, and used it through the ’80s. Got our first computer probably seven or eight years ago. Maybe ten, but probably seven or eight. I just really [can’t] nail it down. The biggest advancement for *me* personally -- and since I don’t type -- is the computer for camera work. We don’t use the darkroom for *any* pictures anymore. Have a negative scanner. We started in January of 1996, and I haven’t made a photographic picture since. I scan the negatives -- [with the] machine here -- scan the negatives and do this, and you end up with a paper print. No photographic paper involved.

RB: Uh-huh. But it has that kind of quality. So it’s got a good quality to it.

NR: It’s pretty good. It’s not what it was. It’s not as sharp. But when I quit making photographs, an eight by ten [inch] sheet of paper, *processed*, cost you a dollar.

**[Tape meter, 350]**

So most pictures in the paper cost us fifty cents apiece before we ever did anything else with them. You know, you made the photograph, it cost you fifty cents. Then you either had to make a negative in the darkroom of it or you had to make a PMT [photomechanical transfer] copy of it, and that cost another dollar. Now it’s close to

three bucks for a, say, three column by four inch picture in a paper. That right there [the scanned print] costs you ten cents or *less*. (chuckles)

RB: Mm-hmm. Once you have the equipment and software \_\_\_\_...

NR: When you do it this way, you're doing it on nothing but a piece of paper and your time. It's nothing! It's absolutely nothing! (chuckles) And you can save all of them you want! You can do whatever you want to with them.

RB: This Printscan that you're using right there, that scans negatives. Does it scan...

NR: Just one at a time, thirty-fives [thirty-five millimeter film.]

RB: ...slides, too?

NR: Yeah. You can do color with it. *I* can't because we have no need for it. Because we don't do color yet. Someday we *may*, but right now our paper is so large that the amount of pages used... If you're going to go color and they don't have a color ?ump?, you lose three presses, and three presses is twelve pages! And I can't give up twelve...

**[Tape meter, 379. End Side Two, Tape One of Two.]**

**[Tape meter, 001. Begin Side One, Tape Two of Two.]**

RB: The following interview with Neil Richards, publisher of the Potosi Independent Journal, takes place in Mr. Richards' office on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1998.

...in what you said about the biggest transition for you *personally*, because...

Now prior to that, prior to the computer -- and you had gone into offset -- had you yourself been one that developed film and that kind of thing?

NR: Oh, we've always done that kind of stuff, or it seems like we have. You know, that's just always been part of being in the newspaper business. Like I said, we did offset. I've had an offset *press* to print job printing since [*thoughtful pause*] March of 1968.

RB: And so you were doing that kind of work, you had a small [press.]

NR: Well, see, we got it so we could print full -- I got a bigger press than most people have, I've got a seventeen by twenty-two -- and I got so we could print full-page handbills for the grocery stores. We had three grocery stores [that] had a full-page every week, and they wanted handbills printed. And they circulated them out in the community. You know I mean, we *mailed* them. We used to *mail* them for them. And none of them do that anymore. They've all quit that. We don't make up any of the ads anymore. There's been a lot of change. They get them made up by their firm, whatever company they're with, and they print them where they print a bunch of them, and we just get them as an insert now.

RB: Were you also doing some typing though, at that time, in the offset business?

NR: We did...

RB: Did you do it yourself or did you have...?

NR: Not personally.

RB: You had others that...

NR: Not personally. I did the production part of it. I run the press. I did darkroom work -- got the negatives, burned the plates. You know, got it ready to print, and did the printing. My son does the makeup. The other gentleman that I spoke of, he used to do all the commercial printing makeup until my son came along.

RB: Have you ever done any of the writing part of it?

NR: I do it all. Whatever's done.

RB: The writing?

NR: Yes. That's my end of it. Like I say, when George left... This was *never* what I intended to do, even when I *bought* the paper. Production was my end. You know, I did the repair work, I bought all the supplies, handled all that kind of stuff. Production was my end of it. I never intended to be in here. But I've been here ever since 1971.

(chuckles)

RB: So when George left you had to take over that writing part of it.

NR: Yeah.

RB: I guess in a way George would probably have been a pretty good person to have as -- I don't want to say maybe a *teacher*, but as a person who kind of set some pretty good examples on how to...

NR: Pattern?

RB: Yeah, patterns on how to do things.

NR: Yeah.

RB: But you also get a lot of news, then, don't you?

NR: Oh, yeah.

RB: Do you have correspondents?

NR: A few. That's pretty well gone by the wayside. Not real responsive in this community. I've been trying for two years to get some correspondents out in the country, and people just aren't interested in doing that anymore. They like to read it! *Everybody* likes to read



it, but nobody wants to go to the trouble of doing it. I have two women who do it right now, and that's all.

RB: Now, where do they live?

NR: In the south end of the county, around [the] Caledonia area. Both of them at Caledonia, really.

RB: Because you cover that area, too?

NR: Oh, yeah.

RB: What would you say your news coverage is?

NR: It's all of Washington County.

RB: The entire county.

NR: I don't get out of Washington County for hardly anything. And I'll try to cover *just* about anything that's going on in Washington County if I can.

RB: That's one of the questions that I had. Your paper is very *rich* in local news. And I was just wondering how in the world you'd cover all that if you don't have correspondents.

NR: About eighty hours a week, that's how you do it! (laughs) You work about eighty hours a week.

RB: So you yourself are going down and getting the scoops and stuff and the information. Do you have anybody else doing that kind of thing?

NR: No.

RB: Would you say then that your job, in writing these features, [that] you're also the reporter?

NR: Yes.

RB: So you go out and collect and bring...

NR: Take the pictures.

RB: Take the pictures, too.

NR: Take the pictures, make the pictures, write the stories, edit everything that goes in the paper. Nothing gets in the paper that I don't see first.

**[Tape meter, 050]**

RB: And so that's about an eighty hour a week... (laughs)

NR: It's not a good system. I wouldn't advise anybody of it, but it works for me, I guess.  
(laughs)

RB: That's amazing, a lot of work. Another question I had then is about your staff. Over the years, some papers have started getting more people coming in that have some education from schools of journalism (since we have one here in the state) and people who have more official training or whatever, formal training. Have you had any of those?

NR: George had a degree in journalism. Never had anybody else. That's been it. I did have a boy work here a little while. He's still here. He has a degree in mass media, but he doesn't work. He didn't work out. He was here a little while. I've tried people. It doesn't work. We don't see eye-to-eye, I guess, is the thing to say. Let's say it that a-way. Their idea of what a story is and what needs to be in a paper doesn't necessarily suit what I want. Maybe I don't know. (laughs)

RB: That's another question I have. Nowadays we're in an era where the media is important to the point of occasionally being overbearing. (chuckles)

NR: I try to stay totally away from all the controversial stuff. I really do. I've *always* wanted the newspaper -- as long as I've been involved with it -- to be like a letter from home.

That's what I would prefer for it to be. And I don't like to chase all of that other kind of stuff.

RB: Mm-hmm. Because that is a *mission* that some papers have, that investigative journalism.

NR: Mostly dailies. You don't see a lot of that in weekly newspapers. You see some in the big ones. Washington, they do a good job with that type of thing. But a daily paper, they have to make news. You know? A weekly paper doesn't have room for what happens by accident. (chuckles) You can't get everything in that you get... And keep it up to date.

RB: And yet there has to be over a period of time, there are occasionally some controversial issues that come up in every community.

NR: Oh, yeah.

RB: And you have to report on those, I'm sure.

NR: Oh, yeah, there's times that there's things that you have to handle, of course. But you don't have to go looking for them either. You know, maybe I'm wrong. I understand that the public has a right to know, but they're not obliged to be told, okay?

RB: (laughs) By you, anyway.

NR: Right. Right, I think that sometimes it's overdone. And I think in a whole lot of instances the *presence* of the media is what causes things to be what they are. People are putting on a show.

RB: Mm-hmm, it changes the event.

NR: It wouldn't happen. A lot of things *would not* happen were it not for somebody's face being in a TV screen. I really believe that.

RB: Another that you said a while back [that] I'm thinking about that has to do with editorial style and that kind of thing, is politics. Now, didn't you say at one time that there was someone who wanted to take the Democratic stance? It was a Bell?

NR: Bell was a Democrat.

RB: He kept the paper because he wanted to represent that...?

NR: Well, not necessarily. He was a Democrat politician. He was in Democrat politics in the state. He was a state elected official. But it didn't carry a whole lot of it over into the paper. You know, when there was two papers you could afford to have that type of a stance, but when you take those two papers and put them together, you've pretty well got to take care of everybody.

**[Tape meter, 100]**

You don't get way out on a limb. My preference has always been for each party to think I'm doing more for the other one. (laughter from both parties) Do you understand what I'm saying? I'm independent.

RB: They don't see you as their friend.

NR: Right.

RB: You're not in anyone's pocket.

NR: They always think, "Well, you're doing more for them than you do for me." It's pretty well always been that way.

RB: Now that's another theme. Just as you say, family is a theme in newspaper in Missouri. But another theme is that politics seem to be associated with newspapers quite often.

NR: In a lot of cases, yes. Maybe not so much in the news as it is in their editorial. And I don't do a lot of editorials. You know, when you're [the] only newspaper in town, you don't need a lot of that. I can understand the need for it. I've written a few. But when you have to go out and look for things, well, it's...

RB: Well, some editors feel that they have a role in their community, and some see it in kind of a maybe leadership [position], or somehow or another that they should be kind of a... I don't know how to say it, maybe, but encourage people to think in a certain way, or something like that.

NR: I understand that, and I'd say that probably journalism, maybe that's what people expect. But there's a classic thing that happened to a friend of mine just not too long ago in a public meeting. This man is a journalist. Somebody told him, said, "You've *always* got an opinion about everything. Did you ever think maybe you might ought to keep it to yourself once in a while?" (laughs) So you know, they're not always appreciated. (laughs)

RB: And so you have over the years toned down some of that aspect of it.

NR: We don't have a whole lot of that. Even when George was here there was not... He never did involve himself much in editorializing. Not a whole lot.

RB: Now, there's another thing that has to do with politics but on a much more local level. Parts of it could be classified under the category of "boosterism" and that kind of thing where you support your community and you represent things...

NR: We do plenty of that!

RB: ...and that's an important...

NR: We do plenty of that. We do that *everywhere*. (chuckles)

RB: Right. But that another part of... It kind of seems to me that [you] can't avoid some kind of political maneuvering. When you're trying to represent all of these communities and yet some them want to... They're in competition for one reason or another. *I feel* they're in competition.

NR: About the only place that you have a whole lot of that problem is in sports. (laughs) I get a lot of complaints on that in sports. They think that Potosi gets too much [coverage.] But with the rest of the stuff, they don't have a whole lot of competing things. You know, like the picnics and what have you. Nobody tries to walk on each other's times. Fundraisers and that type of thing. They always schedule early enough, schedule them regularly enough that they don't...

RB: In coordination.

NR: Yeah. Everybody pretty well has their thing and they have their time. Richwoods, Old Mines, Fertile, Caledonia, Belgrade...

RB: *Really* noticed a kind of a cooperation like that. I have noticed just in being with some of these people and involved in some of these events a spirit of cooperation here in the last...

NR: They do pretty well.

RB: ...five years or so at least, or maybe it's more than that.

**[Tape meter, 150]**

But then I hear stories, too, about a time when there was more rivalry among various groups who were trying to do things. And I suppose that's unavoidable to *some* extent.

NR: There was a lot of that previous to our bicentennial in 1963. And at time everybody pulled in the same direction and they found out what could happen.

RB: So you see that as a sort of a watermark?

NR: I really believe that the bicentennial proved to most everybody around that people could work together and be more successful than pulling in different directions. I really think so. And I think that it still comes through today, although we have lots of people today that really know nothing about the bicentennial. (laughs) It was twenty-five years ago, you know.

RB: But they're enjoying the benefits of that kind of thing.

NR: Right.

RB: There has been a number of those sort of large "anniversary" sort of events in Washington County, and I notice in this week's newspaper there's one of them: The 275<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...

NR: It's a continuation of this same thing that we're talking about, the French.

RB: Right. And you had a great layout in there about an event that took place. But it was in Old Mines that it took place?

NR: Mm-hmm.

RB: There was a Richards involved in the committee work that came out in a couple of the photographs. Was she kin to you?

NR: Her husband would be my third or fourth cousin.

RB: Okay. I was just wondering because I saw that and I wanted to ask you about...

NR: She's a Johnston, that's who she really is. That's her family name, is Johnston.

RB: Okay, and her married name is Richards.

NR: Yeah. She was a schoolteacher. I guess retires this year.

RB: Well, it's a remarkable... Even though history is important, I think, in a lot of communities probably throughout Missouri, none of them have the kind of depth that you're talking about here. How important is that a factor in the community? For instance, there's a certain number of people... This Mrs. Richards, [a] former schoolteacher, you know, people [who are] familiar with the reading [or] whatever and that kind of thing... Do you think it affects the general feeling of people in the community?

NR: I'm certain that it does, especially when it is publicized. When they're doing things, when they're active. The historical societies have made a great difference in the community. They get a *lot* of support, both Old Mines and Potosi. And Caledonia has a bicentennial committee that is getting some support. You know, those type of things draw people together and it's good for the communities, there's no doubt about it. There's a whole lot of more talk about history now than there ever was. There's no doubt about that.

RB: So that would be one of those changes that you would say that you've seen in your lifetime?

NR: Oh, yes. Nobody thought about history in the '50s or '60s.

RB: Even though they had plenty of it behind them.



NR: Of course! You know, we had the wars and stuff. World War Two and Korea and the Kennedy Assassination, stuff like that. Everybody was centered on what was happening to *them* rather than what happened before, I think. I really do.

**[Tape meter, 200]**

But the formation of the historical societies have really brought a lot of interest from a generation that *may* have lost it completely had it not happened.

RB: So now they're starting to have more an interest?

NR: And we'll have tangible things for people to know about that would have been gone forever.

RB: So preservation goes along with that?

NR: Yes. Yes, I'm sure that it's going to make a big difference in, say, another fifty years down the road. What's being done or what has been done over the past twenty years, twenty-five years, is going to make a *big* difference in the history of what's available to our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

RB: So now, in your period of work here, which would include from the mid-50s and then through the 60s and 70s and 80s and now we're all at the end of the 90s, you're bound to have seen some trends and a lot of changes. We've talked about some. The technology's changed. The community's changed, too, though, I'm sure. And one of these things you say, these historical anniversary-type things, are kind of a big story. What else? What else have been the big changes that you've seen?

NR: Oh, boy! That's a [tough question.]

RB: How about stories in your paper? Do you have any that you look back and think of as “This was our big edition”?

NR: No, not just offhand. No. [In] more recent years we’ve had some fantastic success in baseball. Sports, a lot of emphasis on sports. One of the things that has happened to Potosi, Washington County, is it became a bedroom community after the war for people that worked in St. Louis. As travel becomes much better, we are seeing more and more people come back home and still commute. You know, we had a lot of people that commuted. But now that St. Louis is so big that you can be there (chuckles) in less than an hour... And now we have a whole lot of people that are living here, have people who have retired back here, we’ve got a lot more retirement in the community than we ever had before. People didn’t live that long, I guess, is the reason maybe. (chuckles) You know, there’s a whole lot more retirement in the community than there was.

RB: Did you have at one time, let’s say right after the war...? For example, like you say, you had a lot of people that moved *out* to get the job.

NR: Yeah, they left completely.

RB: And so what you’re saying is that there’s been a return of some of that population.

NR: There’s been a return of it and then besides that, even though they’re not working in the community, they’re not leaving as much as they used to. They just drive.

RB: So what you say we might call “out migration” is no longer a trend.

NR: Not as bad as it was.

**[Tape meter, 250]**

You know, in the '40s and '50s, when you had graduation, fifty, sixty percent of the people were gone forever, maybe. They just left and that was it. They never come back. Maybe away to other states, maybe just to St. Louis or what have you. But as the roads have gotten a little better and commuting is a lot faster and people don't think near as much about *driving* like they used to... You know, used to be back in the '50s, you *planned* to go to St. Louis. (chuckles)

RB: That's right. That's a big thing.

NR: Right! It was big! But *now* people don't think anything about running up there after work! So we have a whole lot more people who are just going ahead and *living* here and going outside the community to work.

RB: Now, do you find that you have a lot -- like I think it's what you mentioned was that you have a lot of people who had formerly *left* but then they would like to retire back [in this area]?

NR: We have a lot of that. You know, they had family homes here or their parents still stayed here, that type of thing. They can come and get part of the old family farm and put them a home on it, that type of thing. We're having quite a bit of that. Getting quite a lot of it.

RB: I noticed in one of your issues there -- it seems like not long ago you had an issue about unemployment.

NR: Unemployment's been a *real* problem here since the close of the mining industry.

RB: And [that's] been quite a while. So you kind of like a post-mining...?

NR: It's twenty years, almost. Nineteen years.

RB: Nineteen years?

NR: 1979 is when Pea Ridge Iron Mine did it. 1979.

RB: And before that you had other sorts of mining that was petering out.

NR: There was never enough that it... You know, you could not see or feel the effect. You had twenty guys, ten guys, eight guys, a half a dozen guys working at different tiff mines and what have you. And one closed, you know, nobody thought anything about it. It didn't *impact* anybody. Well, whenever Pea Ridge closed, you had 300, probably, local people -- that were making more money than they'd ever made before in their life -- out of work.

RB: So that was a big effect. Late '70s.

NR: 1979. Christmas.

RB: And it was a time when there was some economic changes in the country. Like I was talking about [in] Louisiana [prior to the start of the interview.] Had a period where money was worth less. Inflation was going on and that kind of thing. Has Potosi started to turn a corner on that or where does it go?

NR: Well, we've continued to work at it. Who knows what's coming?

**[Tape meter, 300]**

We're ready, we're prepared for it. We have an industrial property out here with some water in it, and sewer's going in, and a little bit of the road's in, and we have a promise of some stuff. The prison has employed quite a few people.

RB: Now, that's another issue that's kind of come up. Some were against it, I suppose.

NR: Oh, yeah! We had a few people against it. The classic thing that the prison people told us at the time is that there are only two times that people try to fight a prison: When

they're coming in and when they're trying to leave. (laughs) It's been a non-issue for the community. I mean, with maximum security, it just isn't. We've had one guy get out and there's still some question about that, about how he got out. And he ended up in Memphis, so [he] didn't stay around here long!

RB: How about more about the business, now? Your son's involved now. Do you have any vision on that? Do you think he'll stick with it?

NR: Well, I presume that he's going to. I can't imagine that he's not. I don't know. I have two stepsons and another son, and they have not really been involved in the business to amount to anything. My oldest stepson has his own business, and the next one worked on the river and now he works in construction, and my youngest son -- who is not that young anymore -- but anyway, he has a birthday Friday, which happens to be the anniversary of my dad's death. Yeah, July the 10<sup>th</sup>. He'll be, what, twenty-seven. And he has a master's degree in engineering, works in St. Louis.

RB: Oh, that's great! That's great!

NR: Civil engineer.

RB: But this son... George, is it?

NR: No. Kris.

RB: Kris, I'm sorry. Now, he's had some education you say?

NR: He went to Springfield for a year and a half and then came home.

RB: And most of what he's learned about the paper...

NR: It's all been here. It's all been right here. He had been here before. He worked during his school years, much the same as I did. He probably drew his first pay when he was nine or ten years old, something on that order.

**[Tape meter, 350]**

And he's thirty-six now.

RB: It's that family affair. Well, we're running up to the end of this [audio tape] line right here. Do you have any other statements that you'd like to mention?

NR: No, I don't guess. I've pretty well covered everything, I imagine.

RB: I really appreciate your taking time with us like that.

NR: Glad to be able to do it.

RB: Each one of these papers, like we've mentioned, there's some common themes, but each one has had different situations and solved problems a little bit different, you know, as they went along.

NR: I would think it would really be a problem now to interview anybody who's been in the paper long enough to know even what happened.

RB: Right, that's right! It's a good time to catch the older, the ones with the most experience now because later on...

NR: They're going to be gone. They're *all* going to be gone. I don't know of any other independently owned paper around other than Percy Pascoe. You know he owns Steelville [the Steelville Star-Crawford Mirror], and his [newspaper] at Cuba [the Cuba Free Press.]

RB: Would he be a good one to talk to?

NR: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Salem, the man is hardly ever there that owns it and...<sup>7</sup>

**[Tape meter, 378. End Side One, Tape Two of Two.]**

**[Tape meter, 001. Begin Side Two, Tape Two of Two.]**

RB: ...conglomerate. Smith, you say?

NR: Yeah, Smith. That's who bought Festus. That's who eventually ended up with Festus. After we had gone to Hillsboro all that time.

RB: Did you have to think about this, whether you were...? You say you were courted by the [conglomerate,] so they wanted to buy your paper. In that case, they probably would've kept you on, right?

NR: I could have stayed, I could have stayed. What basically happened is: All of my family has inherited their shares. They have no history of investment. They have not worked here. My half of it -- fifty-six percent -- I bought from my uncle. So I can say that I gave "x" dollars for it and when it comes to a tax situation, [there's] something I can do with it. Doesn't make any difference how big the figure is, my sisters wouldn't get hardly *anything* out of a sale! Capital gains just eat you up when you have no investment at all.

RB: Uh-huh, right. You could balance it but they couldn't.

NR: I could figure something out. I could have received a *major* portion from a non-compete clause for five years.

RB: But that'd be a little bit more than half of the whole business. And because it's a family deal, you have to think about it...

---

<sup>7</sup> Possibly referring to Ray Vickery, the publisher of the Salem News.

NR: Well, see, the government's worked on a situation now where you can have a one-time estate deal. You can have a one-time thing. But most everybody that contacts you now is representing somebody that they're trying to sell to, so it's not like... Now, the [St. Louis] Post-Dispatch is going to be looking for a lot of businesses.

RB: Oh, really?

NR: Yeah, see, they're getting completely out of the radio and TV, and going to go be nothing but print industry. And they're going to have several billion dollars that they've got to do something with or they're going to be giving it all to the government!

RB: And if they want to stay in focus in that business, they have to acquire.

NR: They're going to be acquiring *lots* of newspapers, lots of them. I'm sure they will.

RB: So what you're saying then is that the day of the independent...

NR: It's really numbered. They're *really* numbered. They're down to the last possible time. There won't be many more. You know, just off the top of my head I can't give you a figure but an educated guess would be that independents rank less than thirty percent now in the state. In another five years I would guess that there may be as little as half that.

RB: Well, this is [a] pretty good time, then, to get in it...

NR: It's harder and harder and harder to stay in business. Insurance and such things. The print media is not as popular as it was! It's not as popular as it was. The main thing that we have going for us is that... You know, you see it on TV or you've got to wait to maybe see it again if it was something that you didn't catch all of. If you see it in a newspaper, if you want to see it a hundred years from now, it's *still there*. (chuckles)



RB: That's right. And who knows what's going to happen to the computer stuff, too? 'Cause they have news on the computer, too, but...

NR: Internet is going to be a nightmare. I *really* think it's going to be a nightmare.

RB: In terms of archives or whatever \_\_\_\_\_?

NR: Oh, I don't know who's going to control it. You know, I can see *monumental* lawsuits. People are putting *anything* they want to say on the internet. You can't do that! Somebody will have to be accountable one way or another one of these days. I don't know what's going to happen with that. You know, people just... Anything you want to type, you put it on there! (chuckles)

RB: But then is that a trend anyway, though?

NR: I don't know.

**[Tape meter, 050]**

RB: Because, gosh, there's a lot of stuff that goes in print, too.

NR: Oh, yeah.

RB: Even magazines that are supposed to be respectable have to retract large statements.

NR: Yeah, it happens. It happens everywhere.

RB: In fact, the news media is kind of a... Well, people are critical of the news media at different points. Certain things happen and criticism flares up and then it kind of settles down. It goes in waves like that. But I guess you don't really feel that much of that in this neighborhood.

NR: Shouldn't at all, because it's not the same thing. The things that effect people that they're really worried about are... It's daily newspaper, it's TV type stuff. It's stuff that [is in]

fifteen seconds sound bites. You know, it's not the printed word normally. It's not that. You don't get in a *whole* lot of trouble with somebody's obituary or somebody's wedding. And there's nobody left to do that! Lots of people are now charging for obituaries, engagements, birthdays, wedding anniversaries. A lot of newspapers are charging for the space that that type of thing takes in the paper. I would *really*, really be disappointed if we ever get in a position that we have to do that. I *really* don't want to ever have to do that. I don't think you're a newspaper anymore if you don't do that.

RB: Gosh, that's just something that I'd taken for granted there.

NR: It's a money business. I mean, everything is nowadays. And you've got to figure dollars and cents to make it go around. A whole lot of them have elected to begin to charge for obituaries. To me that is one of the main things that people pick up a paper for. I know people that would not get a paper at all if it wasn't for the obituaries. That's the only thing they look at to start with!. You know, *later* they read something else, but they read the obituaries very first thing. Had one man tell me one time, he said, "The only reason I do is I want to make sure I'm not in there!" (laughter) He says, "If I pick up the paper and I'm not in there, then I figure I got another day or two at least."

RB: (laughing) Not all that bad! Life's not that hard yet! But you were able to do that kind of service. The kind of service you're talking about, announcements or whatever, and all the whole range. Your paper's full of it.

NR: And you would be surprised! Although we have never charged anyone for a wedding [engagement] announcement, a wedding, or an obituary, it is so common everywhere else that when people bring that stuff in or call to see about putting it in, the very first

question they have is how much is it going to cost. They have no idea that there's no cost involved. I'm talking about the eighteen to thirty [year old] generation. People that maybe this is their first time to have a contact with [a] newspaper. They've never been in it any other way other than maybe they had their picture taken at school for something, or something like that. And it's the first time that they've really contacted the newspaper for anything. They thought that it'd cost! And it's universal. It's not poor people, it's not the rich people, it's not the middle class. It's *all* of them think the same way.

RB: We're becoming conditioned to...

NR: It costs money! (chuckles)

RB: ...understand we'll have to pay, everything. But traditionally your circulation covers -- hopefully -- your circulation and everybody subscribing and buying the papers covers the cost of...

NR: That's another thing that has really changed. It's kind of scary in one sense. The rack sales of papers almost exactly equals the mail outs. And that has happened over about the last ten years.

RB: Whereas ten years ago what percentage would you have...?

**[Tape meter, 100]**

NR: I'd say that it has probably changed by twenty percent, maybe just over twenty percent. The people that I have contacted -- not through any concern, but just happened to mention, "How come you buy a paper instead of being a subscriber?" -- they [reply that they] want it that much quicker. You know, there was a time when the only place you could get the newspaper was to come to the newspaper [office] to get it. Now that we

have thirty outlets in the county... I think *every* little grocery store, convenience store in the county has papers for sale. So if you want a paper, you can get it just about anywhere and won't have to drive *very* far from *any house* to get one. That's probably made a whole lot of the difference. They get it. It costs them more money. They pay more money for it, but that doesn't have anything to do with it. They don't have to wait for it, they've got it now. They've got it in their hand! (chuckles)

RB: (laughs) That is kind of hard to understand, that trend. But you're not saying the number of papers sold have decreased necessarily.

NR: No.

RB: It's just the difference in how people are acquiring their paper.

NR: The number of people who purchase it over the stand has increased over the years. I wouldn't have really a guess of what percentage, but there are many, many who get it in the mail but also buy it. I've had them tell me, "Well, we buy the paper and when the one comes in the mail we give it to so-and-so," somebody in the neighborhood that doesn't get it or they mail it off to their kid that's off someplace. You know, that type of thing.

RB: Do you send...? Now, here you're in a good place to gauge this. When you talk about people who have left Potosi or Washington County. They grow up, get out of school, and they leave. So what is your circulation...?

NR: Outside?

RB: ...outside of Washington [County]?

NR: Outside of the state of Missouri, probably about a little less than 400. *In* the state of Missouri, about [*thoughtful pause*] probably between 300 and 400. And within a ten mile radius, about 4,200 or 4,300.

RB: Ten mile radius of...?

NR: Potosi. Maybe, say, fifteen mile radius of Potosi, about 4,300.

RB: So that's your big... You sell it to...

NR: Right here.

RB: ...all places in the county.

NR: We're taken care of right here, yeah, is what it boils down to.

RB: Well, that's interesting. It seems like your paper would be a valuable thing for what we might call "expatriates," you know, people who still have family here and find themselves out...

NR: We have several, but you know, it like I say, it's not a great lot. Not a great lot.

RB: Not too much.

NR: They come and go. They'll subscribe for a year or two and then drop it, then come back. It always stays pretty well about the same, the ones away. *Newspaper delivery is not good. It's not good.*

RB: (chuckles) Well, I noticed that at my house. I hate to admit it.

NR: It's just *not* good.

RB: We don't have that far to go to deliver, but...

NR: People out of state don't get them in order, they get them anywhere from a week to two weeks late, and don't get them in *any kind of order* at all!

**[Tape meter, 150]**

I have a sister in California and she may get this week's paper that was mailed yesterday as early as this Saturday -- in California, sometimes. But she may still not have gotten the first week of June! There's just no telling where it is between here and there. And we got really involved one time trying to find out what happens on a situation like that, and we did. What happens is they ship by train, by truck, and then if everything's full by plane. So here goes the train, here goes the truck, and then the one on the plane passes all the rest of them up! Right? (chuckles) That's what happens. You know, they're paying for the air time anyway. If it's not full, they stick the stuff in there and it goes.

Otherwise it goes on something like the Pony Express! (chuckles) So there is *no plan*.

RB: You can't guarantee that you'd have air transport.

NR: *Cannot even guarantee* that they'll get it, really. *You absolutely* cannot guarantee that they'll get it. We had a deal with a man that was really concerned in Seattle, Washington one time. They put a watch on his paper, and we found out, I mean, *exactly* where it was at what time and what have you. And it was disgusting! It was really disgusting. See, each center where it stops it can stay for twenty-four hours before it has to go anywhere. And then if it's not sorted, you know, if it's put in a bag... Let's say you've got a dozen papers going to one particular zip code in California. It may not be sorted for two or three days after it gets there.

RB: It's not a high priority. It's down at the lowest, down at the bottom.

NR: Right. It doesn't even get as much respect as the ones at the bottom, the third class. Because the third class, somebody's invested enough money into it that they've got bar

codes on it and everything, and the machine will read it. (laughs) You know, the newspapers don't have that. And they're not usually in really good shape when people get them either.

RB: That's another thing. They handle them like they do a \_\_\_\_\_. (laughs)

NR: That's right.

RB: Well, maybe there's some way...

NR: We've had some interesting things happen over the years. We had a guy in Texas, and he contacted us. He said, "I've got a neighbor that gets your paper, and he gets it on Wednesday of the next week, and I never get mine 'til Friday." I said, "Well, you know, there's nothing that I can tell you. They come in the same mailbag to the same place." So he went to the post office and he asked them [about it.] From then on he got it on Wednesday! I mean, just like that, he got it on Wednesday. So he happened to have a friend that had some family that worked at the post office. So he asked them, found out what the difference was. There was somebody at the post office who took our paper home with them and read it before they brought it back to send it to him! (laughs)

RB: Well, I'll be doggoned! They took them one day, and then they had to have a turn around on it. (laughs)

**[Tape meter, 200. Man enters room, incidental conversation omitted. Interview resumes, tape meter, 207]**

RB: Okay, maybe we'll... We've had quite a conversation here, and I appreciate all your time. If it's all right we'll cut her off at this point.

NR: That'll be [fine.]

**[Tape meter, 210. End Side Two, Tape Two of Two. End of Interview.]**